

FRONT & CENTER

Providing News to Our Veterans

September 2021



Not Forgotten

Today, Heather Shimko works in Butler VA's Connected Care Department serving Veterans and their families. But 20 years ago, she chose to enlist in the U.S. Air Force Reserve after the tragic events that unfolded on September 11, 2001. Here's her story:

The world stops

On September 11, 2001, I was working as a civilian, helping to manage a large highway construction project in Ohio. I had a 5-month-old son, Mason, at home. I remember pulling onto the vast construction site and wondering what had happened as there was no activity. There was zero work going on even though it was a beautiful and sunny day. Everyone on the job site was huddled in small groups around the vehicles. We had not been listening to the radio and had no idea the events that were about to unfold. I remember the eerie skies that followed in the days after as there were zero aircraft to be seen. It was as if the world stopped.

Answering our nation's call

It was the events of this day that made me want to answer our nation's call and serve our country. As a single mom, the U.S. Air Force Reserve was my best option. I waited a few years until my son could understand why and where I was going before enlisting. As a single 32-year-old mom,

I left my sweet boy with my parents and headed for basic training with the United States Air Force. It was my hope that my small sacrifice could somehow create a better world for our children. This "old lady" was an honor graduate. My parents flew out with my son to watch my graduation. He was the one that tapped me out of formation and there wasn't a dry eye in my Flight. It was also my dad's birthday. He said my graduation would be the best birthday gift, but upon finding out I was an honor graduate, he added that nothing would ever top that.

Continuing to serve

Now my same shy little Mason who understood why I left him for those six short, but long months has answered the same call. He is serving as an active-duty member of the United States Navy and will graduate submariner school this September. How fitting that his graduation will be one week after the 20-year anniversary of why I joined. The loss and devastation from that day are still hard to grasp, but it is my hope that the memory of this day will keep people rallying for our country and our troops for generations to come. I have another son now who is eight, Preston. We taught him what happened on this day and its huge meaning. We need to ensure we continue teaching our children that were not yet born about this day so that the memory is *not forgotten*.



Heather's sons, Mason (left) and Preston (right).



Choose VA

Program for Post-9/11 Veterans

Post-9/11 Veterans, need help navigating VA? The Butler VA's Post-9/11 Veterans team can help you find your way and achieve your goals — whether looking for a job, setting up VA health care, learning about your benefits, readjusting to family life, and beyond. Connect with our team today — call 800-362-8262, ext. 6120 or visit www.va.gov/butler-health-care/health-services/post-911-military2va-m2va-case-management-program/

VA Remembers

The events of September 11, 2001 called brave men and women to serve their country in the Armed Forces. VA remembers your service and sacrifices and is here to help support you now.



TAKE A MOMENT—REACH OUT

Suicide Prevention Month

During Suicide Prevention Month, held in September, VA works to raise awareness of Veteran suicide prevention and to empower Veterans to connect with the resources they need now to prevent suicide later.

Whether Veterans are looking for clinical care, counseling, assistance with benefits, or something else, local and national tools and resources are available:

www.veteranscrisisline.net/get-help/local-resources

Crisis resources are also available. The Veterans Crisis Line is a free, confidential resource that connects Veterans or their loved ones to a real person specially trained to support Veterans. Call 1-800-273-8255 and press 1, text to 838255, or chat online at VeteransCrisisLine.net/Chat, 24 hours a day, seven days a week, 365 days a year. Veterans don't have to be enrolled in VA health care or registered with VA to use the Veterans Crisis Line.

For more information and resources, visit REACH.gov/SPM.



LIVE WHOLE HEALTH: FIND MOMENTS OF STILLNESS

When our days feel overly busy or stressful, it can be nice to slow down and find moments of stillness. There are many ways to do that throughout the day, even if just for a minute or two.

Here are a few ideas:

- Take a slow mindful walk/stroll in nature.
- Take a pause and a few slow, deep breaths.
- Find a peaceful spot in nature to sit and soak in the natural beauty.
- Take some time to read a relaxing book, collection of poetry, or other favorites.
- Do some gentle stretching or take a gentle yoga or tai chi class.

VA's Whole Health approach incorporates self-care techniques, including mindfulness, to help you find stillness and to be more conscious of your thoughts and feelings. This type of practice can help with relaxation, processing grief and improving focus. To learn more about mindfulness, visit <https://www.va.gov/WHOLE-HEALTH/veteran-handouts/index.asp>.

ADDITIONAL DOSE OF MODERNA COVID-19 VACCINE

The Butler VA Health Care System is currently administering an additional dose of the Moderna COVID-19 vaccine to all Veterans who meet CDC's guidelines of being moderately to severely immunocompromised: www.cdc.gov/coronavirus/2019-ncov/vaccines/recommendations/immuno.html

Veterans are required to schedule an appointment by calling Butler VA's call center at 888-266-9040.

Moderna COVID-19 additional dose vaccines will be provided to Veterans regardless of enrollment status and where they received their original doses. Additional dose vaccines will be administered at Butler VA's New Castle Road campus at 325 New Castle Road, Butler (campus is located directly across from the Wal-Mart entrance) from 9 a.m. – 2 p.m., Monday through Friday.

SALUTE YOU

VA



U.S. Department of Veterans Affairs
Veterans Health Administration
Butler VA Health Care System

800.362.8262
724.287.4781

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